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27 January 1977

STATINTL

NOTE FOR:

FROM :

1. I would like to give you a few immediate reactions to your comments on the "B" Team report, and perhaps more later. As a starting point for our somewhat longer-term effort to assess how well the Community is equipped to deal with the whole problem of understanding the Soviet military challenge in the future, and also because Admiral Murphy has instructed us to do our own audit of the "B" Team's charges, we too have surveyed the record. On the whole, we seem to be coming out with the same kinds of judgments you reached. The balance and sobriety of your assessment so far is highly commendable. The rebuttal could probably be more vigorous and still fair to the record.

2. My vantage point on all this is less with who gets the better of which argument than with diagnosing and treating problems of performance. I am especially concerned with what the polemics around the "B" Team affair may obscure.

3. Take the matter of "soft data," for example. What, for heaven's sake, is "soft data?" Clearly it includes Soviet military literature, on which "B" Team opinions rest heavily. It presumably includes clandestine and other human reporting on Soviet perceptions, intent, doctrine, expectations, etc. What about COMINT related to same? "B" Team asserts we are willing to make judgments about intent by inference from physical observations on programs rather than from sources more directly pertinent to expressions of intent. But both enterprises are very "soft" and require a lot of assumptions. The "soft-hard" vocabulary is a childish way to talk about the problem.

4. Nevertheless, I think the "B" Team has a point -- perhaps in a sense it does not realize. Recent estimates have devoted a lot of paragraphs to issues involved in understanding Soviet intent and motivation: military doctrine and disputes, institutional pressures, economic constraints

and options, foreign and military policy interactions, perceptions of the West. We write words and pass, usually equivocal, judgments about these matters. But we do not support them with analysis of sufficient depth, volume, and rigor. Those who participate in developing these judgments, from working group to NFIB, do not proceed from a common appreciation of the documentary evidence and analytic base that does exist. Perhaps worst of all, the more senior estimates officers -- from GS-14s to NIOs -- do not have the time to read and reflect on the high volume of pertinent documents and analysis necessary to develop a good feel for the subjective side of Soviet military affairs. The result is that judgments about that side of things are generated in more of a vacuum than need exist. The judgmental process involved in passing on so-called "soft" issues with "soft" data is necessarily subjective and intuitive. For that reason we cannot afford to have it be as slap-dash and spotty as it is.

5. The only solutions are really very simple, but not comforting. We need more qualified Soviet area specialists analyzing the relevant materials. And officers up the pyramid of estimative authority must pare their responsibilities to allow them to be much more intimate with those materials and thoroughly versed in the analysis that results from them.

6. The "B" Team explicitly assumes that more attention to documentary evidence bearing on Soviet intentions, e.g., military literature or internal propaganda on the "correlation of forces," will support their more "somber" judgments. This is not obvious and unlikely to be entirely true. They claim to rest much on their reading of Soviet military literature. But I am told that when they met with the "A" Team, they simply dismissed our work on Soviet perceptions and on controversy among Soviets about nuclear strategy.

7. When I counseled the "B" Team last September I argued that, to have a constructive impact, they had to try to grapple with some 12 key themes or issues bearing on Soviet motives and perceptions (attached). They had not only to state a judgment but present evidence as best they could. They only dealt in the end with a few of those themes, pontificating and polemicizing, rather than analyzing.

8. I was particularly disappointed by their complete failure to attempt defining some sort of operational theory of strategic victory: An explicit scenario or sequence of military events and expected consequences during a large-scale nuclear war. The strenuous assertion that the Soviets are out for strategic superiority and confident of getting it requires articulation of such a theory. We have enough good evidence to piece such a theory together for theater war in Europe. We are in much poorer shape as to Soviet views on a strategic exchange. But they have to have a model of some sort. We have insight into pieces of it. And one can put together a plausible, if not demonstrably valid, whole theory. One can then run engagement analyses with the force projections to get a crude feel for how well present and future Soviet forces could implement the theory. Although Nitze claims that his "net assessment" studies represent this kind of analysis, they really do not; they are to devoid of operational reality. And the "B" Team report is completely devoid of this kind of thing.

9. What is the superiority the Soviets are out for, then? How do the "B" Team feel about the recent force projections? Do any of the force projections achieve superiority for the Soviets? Or are all the projections too low? Given the scope of the "B" Team's assault on the NIEs, it is really unsatisfying to find they gave no attention to the force projections at all . . . but not surprising. Had they tried to develop some view of the force projections, they would have had to face the problem of the Soviet military planner: How do you turn an appetite for superior military power into the real thing?

10. The failure of the "B" Team to support their case on what Soviet strategic policy is does not invalidate their case. It may be right or wrong. With all the furor, the real disappointment in their part of the drill is that they helped so little in solving the problem. Alas, we still have it.

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Attachment:

One-page "Key Themes" paper

SOVIET STRATEGIC POLICY AND OBJECTIVES

KEY THEMES

Ends and Goals

1. Soviet purposes in world affairs
2. The total role of military power
3. The "correlation of forces"
4. Deterrence and warfighting
5. The Soviet theory of strategic victory

Means and Methods

6. Principles of "military construction"
7. Evolutionary and revolutionary weapons technology
8. Detente and SALT

Limits and Constraints

9. US competitiveness
10. The economic burden
11. Bureaucratic behavior
12. Political dispute